



CHAPTER 7 - DISASTER RESPONSE

7.1 COMMUNICATIONS

Effective communication is critical to delivering services to Missourians, and is the single most important element to effectively responding to a man-made or natural disaster. Effective communication is required both vertically and laterally, and becomes more necessary and more difficult prior to, during, and after a natural or man-made disaster. Effective communication is not eloquent speech or flowing prose, but rather is the ability to convey information clearly and concisely in a manner that is easily understood. Answering the 6 W's (who, what, when, where, why, and how) is always a solid communication foundation upon which to build.

References:

- 1) Department of Natural Resources Continuity of Operations COOP)/Continuity of Government (COG) Plan
- 2) Environmental Emergency Response Yellow Pages
- 3) Office Succession of Command Policy Letters
- 4) National Incident Management System (NIMS)
- 5) FEMA Course IS242: *Effective Communication*

7.1.1 Internal Communication

Disastrous events occur with and without warning and during business and non-business hours. Regardless of the disaster, effective communication is critical to ensure that the department is able to respond quickly, efficiently, and effectively. Additionally, personnel accountability throughout all phases of the disaster is of utmost concern, especially if the emergency occurs without warning during office hours.

Each office will maintain an up-to-date listing of after hours contact information and will periodically test its ability to contact individuals after hours. These tests will also include the ability to communicate with division management.

Each office shall have a plan in place for the rapid notification of personnel in the event of a sudden and unexpected disaster. This plan should include methodology for communicating throughout the chain of command in your office, but also up the chain of command to division management. The safety of personnel, if the disaster occurs unexpectedly during working hours, is the primary focus and concern. However, this effort should be followed very closely by, or be conducted concurrently with, establishing communication internally and with division management.

Traditional means of communication (telephone, cell phone, and e-mail) should be used subsequent to a disaster if they are available. While both man-made and natural disasters may prohibit one or more of these communications mediums, oftentimes (as proven with Hurricane Katrina) at least one remains viable. The EER spill-line (573-634-2436) is manned 24 hours a day and can always be utilized to communicate.

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Depending upon the magnitude of the disaster, establishing communication may be more difficult and require creativity. In these cases, non-traditional communication methods such as satellite phones and hand-held radios should be used. Beyond these assets, individual creativity must be brought to bear in order to establish communication, but efforts in this regard must not cease until communication is established.

Offices should designate specific individuals with the responsibility for communicating up and down the chain of command during and after a disaster. Managing communication in this manner better ensures a common and accurate message.

Because of the inherent stress associated with a catastrophe, disaster communication within the department should always:

- 1) Present information in sequence.
- 2) Omit unnecessary details.
- 3) Word the message precisely, making every word count.

7.1.2 External Communication

Effective disaster communication with parties outside the agency is facilitated through pre-disaster communication planning and post-disaster implementation. This communication may be with citizens, interest groups, private industries, local officials, state and federal agencies, local news agencies or national news agencies. Division and department public information assets should be utilized and consulted to the fullest extent possible, but these assets cannot be relied upon to handle all of the external communication requests during and subsequent to a disaster. Local resources must be able to handle questions and inquiries on their own.

Each region/program will have a pre-disaster communication plan to ensure adequate and appropriate communication with external entities. These plans will include:

- 1) Designating a primary and alternate Public Information Officer (PIO) in each Region or Program.
- 2) Pre-selecting disaster/crisis communication teams, designating who will talk with the media, who will answer phone calls, and who will make decisions about what to say.
- 3) Providing all PIOs with communications-related training opportunities.

The pre-disaster communication plan will enable the office, and therefore the department, to communicate more effectively with external entities during or immediately following a disaster. PIOs or other employees responsible for external communications should:

- 1) Be accessible or designate someone to be accessible to the media at all times.
- 2) Be active, not reactive.
- 3) Word messages precisely, making every word count.
- 4) Centralize information.
- 5) Speak in sync with other related authorities.
- 6) Avoid jargon, codes, and acronyms; use common names for all personnel and facilities.



7.2 CONDUCTING DAMAGE ASSESSMENTS

Subsequent to any significant man-made or natural disaster, the department will be called upon to conduct damage assessments. The nature of the disaster will dictate the type of assessment, but public drinking water, wastewater, and debris assessments are likely in almost any instance. The more catastrophic the disaster, the greater the number of assessments (in various media) that will be required.

7.2.1 Internal Damage Assessments

Offices should conduct internal damage assessments of buildings, equipment, vehicles, and workspaces subsequent to a local disaster. Internal damage assessments will most likely be required following localized severe weather, but man-made disasters could also prompt assessments. Internal damage assessments can be conducted by any employee, but should be routed up the chain of command within the program/regional office for validation and prioritization. Noted damages, and their impact on the ability of the office to conduct operations, as well as any photographs or amplifying descriptions, should be communicated to division management as soon as possible.

7.2.2 External Damage Assessments

Each office shall be prepared to conduct damage assessments within its region. Each office will establish multi-disciplinary assessment teams prior to an event. Teams should range in size from 3-4, including the designated team leader. Expertise in drinking water, wastewater, and solid waste (debris management) should reside in each team, with additional areas of expertise represented in teams as resources allow. Establishing teams ahead of time facilitates effective training and allows for more efficient deployment.

Offices should also be prepared to designate individuals to be part of SEMA/FEMA strike teams deployed to specific locations for specific purposes (such as debris assessments).

Equipment

Carried within each team:

- digital camera
- GPS unit
- food and water
- first aid kit

Carried by each individual:

- hard hat
- reflective vest
- means of communication (radio, cell-phone, PDA, satellite phone)
- department identification
- additional personal protective gear (brush pants, steel-toed boots, latex gloves, rubber boots, chest/hip waders, rain gear, seasonal clothing, etc)



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Responsibilities:

Regional Director:

- a. Ensure damage assessment teams are formed and appropriately staffed.
- b. Ensure the preparation and proper training of damage assessment teams.
- c. Deploy damage assessment teams based on expertise and external needs.
- d. Ensure teams work with a community throughout recovery (for continuity).
- e. Communicate regularly with division management (department management, SEMA as needed).
- f. Coordinate with other state/relief agencies to determine if assessment teams can assist their efforts, such as carrying food and water to a distribution point.
- g. Assign employees to SEMA/FEMA strike teams as requested.
- h. Ensure that all teams receive a safety briefing prior to initial deployment.

Damage Assessment Team Leader

- a. Ensure the preparation and proper training of all team members.
- b. Ensure the safety of each team member during assessments.
- c. Establish contact with local public officials upon deployment to a community.
- d. Represent the department in the affected community.
- e. Coordinate and communicate on site with local, SEMA, and FEMA officials.
- f. Communicate regularly with the Regional Director, articulating accomplishments, needed resources, community needs and difficulties encountered.
- g. Provide guidance, direction and oversight to team members.
- h. Conduct a safety briefing daily prior to beginning assessment work.

Damage Assessment Team Member

- a. Represent the department in the affected community.
- b. Apply environmental expertise to identify both problems and solutions.
- c. Communicate continually with the Team Leader.
- d. Ensure the safety of each team member during assessments.
- e. Be prepared to assume the role of team leader, should circumstances warrant.
- f. Be prepared to assist in distributing food and water to citizens.

7.2.3 Employee Safety When Conducting Assessments

Employee safety supersedes all other concerns when conducting damage assessments, and personal safety is the responsibility of both the individual and other members of the assessment team. An environment that demands damage assessments is inherently dangerous, requiring all team members to look after themselves and those around them.

Team Leaders are responsible for ensuring that all team members possess appropriate personal protective gear prior to deployment.

Team members should be trained on how to deal with the numerous hazards they are likely to face when conducting damage assessments. These include, but are not limited to:

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Hazard	Suggested Response
Unknown or hazardous substances	Avoid the substance. If possible, safely determine and note the source. Document location (with GPS if possible). Take pictures of substance and source. Communicate location and other details to the Regional Office so that they can bring in additional resources such as EER or local HazMat Teams.
Animals	Likely to be displaced, hungry, and irritable domestic dogs. Depending on the circumstances, team members need to be prepared for wild animals that have been drawn to food or shelter from damaged homes or facilities. Team members should avoid contact with both domestic and wild animals. If animals prevent assessment, and if the animals are unwilling to leave simply because of human presence, temporarily bypass and convey location and type of animal on to the Regional Office for coordination with local animal control or MDC.
Snakes	Snakes are a likely hazard, particularly in a flooding scenario. Team members should be cautious in moving debris by hand or when moving on or amongst debris piles. Additionally, within a structure that has been damaged by a storm accompanied by significant rain or by floodwaters, any dry or warm location should be thoroughly examined before reaching into or entering it. Ceilings and rafters should also be examined to ensure that no snakes are at or above eye level. If possible, snake boots or snakeproof chaps should be worn if feedback or observations indicate the prevalence of snakes in a particular area. When encountered, snakes should be given a safe berth, bypassed, and the assessment should continue.
Downed electrical lines	Very common hazard associated with storms. Downed lines should be avoided. Note location of lines. Provide description and location to the Regional Office or to the local utility company. If downed lines prevent assessment, bypass the location until the line has been repaired or until assurance is received that no current is flowing through it.
Debris	Debris should be expected in the wake of almost every disaster. Team members who encounter roads blocked by debris should not attempt to clear the blockage, as debris can shift easily and is often heavier than it appears. Note location and relay message back through the Regional Office to coordinate with MoDOT, the county, or the city. Team members must also be continually on the alert for falling or unstable debris, and should wear hard hats at all times when assessing debris or advising on-site about disposal methods and options.
Citizens	Team members need to be prepared for desperate citizens that desire only the food, water, clothing, or gas that team members have. Teams should carry extra food and water at all times, and should share with citizens as appropriate. If team members encounter hostile citizens, they should bypass the location, relay details back to the Regional Office and allow the Regional Office to work to arrange an escort by MHP, the Sheriff's Office, or the municipal police.

7.3 PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO COMMUNITIES

Closely allied with conducting damage assessments is providing assistance to communities on a variety of environmental topics subsequent to a disaster. Local elected officials and private citizens will seek guidance on a variety of topics, and offices need to be prepared to provide guidance on open burning, public drinking water quality sampling and assessments, and assistance to waste-water facilities in evaluating functionality.

Disasters of significant magnitude may result in an emergency declaration wherein the Governor allows the Department Director to suspend some environmental regulations in order to facilitate cleanup and recovery. These regulation waivers will be promulgated from the Department Director to the local communities via the Regional Offices. Past disasters have revealed that once waivers are granted, it is expedient for Regional Directors to send a fax to each County Commissioner offering assistance, containing a copy of the waiver signed by the Department Director and any or all department publications listed below. In addition to the County Commissioners, Regional Directors should also consider sending guidance to mayors and city administrators.

Each office should maintain, and periodically update, contact lists (mailing address, phone, and fax) for County Commissioners, mayors and city administrators within their region.

Publications

- [Additional Contact Phone Numbers, Fact Sheet--PUB763](#)
- [Boil Water Notice](#)
- [Disaster-Related Animal Production Mortalities Emergency Procedures, Fact Sheet--PUB1250](#)
- [Disaster Response for On-Site Wastewater Systems, Fact Sheet--PUB761](#)
- [Disaster Response Guidance for Public Drinking Water and Wastewater Systems, Fact Sheet--PUB757](#)
- [Emergency Guidance for Hazardous Materials and Hazardous Waste, Fact Sheet--PUB1249](#)
- [Facts on Open Burning Under Missouri Regulations, Fact Sheet--PUB2047](#)
- [Household Chemicals and Household Hazardous Waste, Fact Sheet--PUB762](#)
- [How to Handle Asbestos-Containing Debris, Fact Sheet--PUB2121](#)
- [National Disaster Recovery For Historic Buildings, Fact Sheet--PUB760](#)
- [What to do with Disaster Debris, Fact Sheet--PUB756](#)